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# Andover Newton Bulletin



Convocation Issue

October, 1954 *June 1956*

In the pages of this Bulletin we are attempting to bring something of the uplift and stimulation that came to the Hill on October 20 during the sessions of the 1954 Fall Convocation. Professor H. Richard Niebuhr delivered two lectures on the Greene Foundation under the general title "The Structure of Faith," and Canon Theodore O. Wedel gave two lectures on the English Foundation under the subject "The Pulpit Rediscovered Theology." We acknowledge with gratitude the willingness of the lecturers to allow the printing of Dr. Niebuhr's first and Canon Wedel's second lecture.

It would be difficult to put into words the effect which the day's events brought about in the thought life of the more than four hundred and fifty students, faculty, alumni, and friends who were present.

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#### *Frontispiece:—*

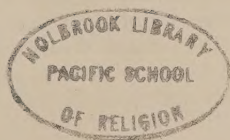
*Left to right:* President Herbert Gezork, Canon Theodore O. Wedel, Dr. H. Richard Niebuhr, and Dean Roy M. Pearson at the Annual Fall Convocation, October 20th, 1954. (Photo by Lenscraft.)

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# Andover Newton Bulletin



OCTOBER, 1954

## STEPHEN GREENE LECTURE

The Stephen Greene Lectureship was established in 1917 in memory of the President of the Newton Board of Trustees by members of his family. Through this Lectureship Fund the School has been most fortunate in getting outstanding speakers "on important subjects related to Christianity in recent history."

This year's Greene Lecture was delivered in two parts by Dr. H. Richard Niebuhr, Ph.D., D.D., of Yale Divinity School. The first portion of his address entitled "The Triad of Faith" appears on .....

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## JOHN M. ENGLISH LECTURE

The John M. English Lectureship was established by the Newton Alumni in honor of Dr. John M. English, Professor of Homiletics at Newton from 1892 to 1927. This Lectureship has made it possible to bring to the School the great preachers of our day in accordance with the purpose of the Lectureship, which is "to strengthen interest in homiletics."

The English Lecture this year was given in two sections by Canon Theodore O. Wedel, Ph.D., S.T.D., of the Washington Cathedral College of Preachers, Washington, D. C. Canon Wedel's second lecture entitled "Christ, Master or Saviour" appears on .....

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Announcement of next year's Greene and English Lectures appears on .....

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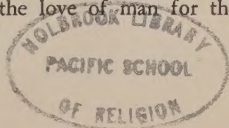


# THE TRIAD OF FAITH

By H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

The central theme in inquiring into the structure of faith is the theme of redemption, of salvation, of deliverance from faithlessness and unfaith to trust and confidence in God. That central theme I cannot sound during the course of these two lectures but I would like to deal with some ancillary themes which may be of some importance in supplying backgrounds and <sup>points of</sup> contacts for the fundamental thing with which we are concerned: how to become Christians, how to become believers, how to trust in God with heart and soul and strength; how to be faithful in His kingdom.

Now it seems to me that when we deal with the story of faith and with the subject of faith we must resist the temptation in theology, as in other inquiries, of following the <sup>thing</sup> maxim<sup>ed</sup> thing, whether it is ~~or is~~ not something else. This motto which is followed in a good many modern inquiries may apply when we are dealing with things. But when we are dealing with relations such as love, hope, and faith are we not led astray by the idea that this reality, this relation is one thing and one thing only? That we can define it with exactitude and that if there is some other definition it is really the definition of another thing? Doesn't the word "faith" point us to a structure rather than to a simple uncompounded relation or reality? I'm thinking in this connection of a great book which is at the same time, to my mind, a misleading and a confusing book, Nygren's *Agape and Eros* in which *agape*, Christian love, is so defined that one loses the sight and the structure of love. Is love one thing? Nygren makes a great contribution when he speaks of and defines God's love for men in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Here is the spontaneous love; the love for what is unworthy, which needs to have all worth bestowed upon it by the lover; this is divine *agape*. Now is there, in man, any possibility of loving like that? When he sees his worthy neighbor, the neighbor in whom is the image of the Great Neighbor, Jesus Christ, he is led astray by the <sup>an idea of</sup> ideal that Christian love can be divine *agape*, <sup>love of the</sup> ~~But~~ what comes into view when we look at Christian love is the great <sup>unworthy</sup> structure of love in which God's love for man is like man's love for God, and God's love for the neighbor; and the neighbor's love for us invites reciprocal love of the neighbor. Here is my Neighbor, Jesus Christ, and here <sup>as</sup> is my neighbor in the image of Jesus Christ — inasmuch as I have done it to thee, most worthy of these, I have done it to Jesus Christ, and they are all worthy. I see a structure of divine love in this human existence in which there are all the dynamic interactions of the love of man for God, and the love of man for the



neighbor, the neighbor's love for <sup>the</sup>himself, and the neighbor's love of God, and God's love of us all; and each of these loves is as peculiar and as different as are the terms that are related by the love, and all of them are qualified by the divine *agape*. And then it seems to me that I not only see a structural relation in love like that but I see that all the structures of human love participate in this relation, so that I cannot say that the family is the place where there is *eros* but not *agape*, but I must say that the family is the place where *eros* is qualified either by the hate of God or by the love of God. But there is no structure of love, — love of country, or love of family, or love of abstract values such as truth — which does not participate positively and negatively in the great divine structure of love. Jonathan Edwards said this very well, many, many years ago. "Love is a structure, it appears, and when I inquire into the meaning of love the structure of human existence also comes into my view though that structure of existence appears in broken and somewhat negative form."

Now, is it not so with faith? What is faith? We may quarrel about the definitions of the philosophers and ask which one of these definitions is right. But when we inquire into ourselves and what we do when we believe, we become aware, I think, of the fact that we are dealing with a structure that is at least as complex as the structure of the atom. At one time the atom seemed to us to be the indivisible thing about which you could only say, "It is itself and nothing else." This is what I mean by atoms indivisible; but when we began to inquire into the atom we found it was a beautiful, mysterious, and complex structure in which the dynamic relations of nuclei, electrons, and protons, and neutrons presented us with something as mysterious and as beautiful as the solar universe itself. When I start with faith and say, "Here is the simple fact of my existence: I believe"; and then inquire into what this believing is, I begin to see the electrons, the protons, the neutrons, the interacting of many realities and many parts. Let's look at it, for a moment. What is it that I do when I believe? Now there are certain philosophers and theologians who say, "I must define 'believing' by paying attention to the amount of certainty there is in believing. The way to understand something is to contrast it with something else. Now believing is to be related to knowing. What's the difference between believing and knowing?" And then they say something like this, for instance, "In the case of Kant, the difference between believing and knowing is this, that in knowing you are certain but in believing you are not quite certain." To be sure, believing has an element of certainty about it so that it must be distinguished from opining, so that we have three degrees of certainty, perhaps: opining, — I think, I have the opinion, I believe.

- p. 7, l. 23, omit "Some us . . . a field"
- p. 7, l. 26, instead of "that the other . . . down" read "that they will not let each other down"
- p. 7, l. 31, instead of "by the act . . . loyalty" read "in the act of mutual loyalty"
- p. 7, l. 35, instead of "something . . . sort" read "civilization"
- p. 7, l. 39, instead of "have to believe this somehow" read "believe somehow"
- p. 8, l. 16, instead of "entered" read "enter"
- p. 8, l. 19, instead of "a community" read "the community" and read "undertake to trust the teacher"
- p. 8, l. 23, insert "know or" before "believe"
- p. 9, l. 3, read "to say that truth is beauty, beauty is truth;"
- p. 9, l. 6, insert comma after "truth" and omit "and"
- p. 9, l. 22, substitute comma for semi-colon.
- p. 9, l. 23, read "the big name 'democracy' to our cause"
- p. 9, l. 24, insert "at one time" after "Germans"
- p. 9, l. 25, read "their cause" instead of "republic" read "Free Peoples' Republic"
- p. 9, l. 26, instead of "its" read "their" and omit "England . . . its cause"
- p. 9, l. 31, instead of "for" read "but"
- p. 9, l. 33, instead of "in loyalty" read "in a context of loyalty" and before "to a reality" read "of loyalty"
- p. 9, l. 38, instead of the first "loyalty to God" read "faith in God;" and after "complete loyalty" insert "or faithfulness"
- p. 9, l. 39, omit "My Father . . . let me down"
- p. 9, l. 40, for "Or 'the Lord . . . my Father'" read "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth"
- p. 10, l. 1, read "even more than in Job" and instead of "still" read "yet"; and insert quotation marks before "though he crucify"
- p. 10, l. 4, omit "faithfulness to God . . . in Him"
- p. 10, l. 5, capitalize "one"
- p. 10, l. 6, instead of "would" read "will"
- p. 10, l. 8, instead of "the marvelous" read "a marvelous"
- p. 10, l. 23, read "the loyal Jesus Christ"
- p. 10, l. 25, instead of "something . . . Christ" read "that which transcends Him"
- p. 10, l. 26, omit "and to pray . . . Kingdom of God"
- p. 11, l. 1, insert "are" before "the actions"
- p. 11, l. 7, insert "is" before "that"
- p. 11, l. 9, omit "but how . . . person"
- p. 11, l. 10, insert "but" before "this strange"
- p. 11, l. 14, omit "Not that . . . animal but"
- p. 11, l. 15, omit "kind of"
- p. 11, l. 19, instead of "the cost" read "a cause"
- p. 11, l. 23, insert "only" before "as the relationship"
- p. 11, l. 34, instead of "ourselves" read "themselves"
- p. 11, l. 37, instead of period insert question mark.
- p. 11, l. 39, instead of "And then . . . thing. All" read "The final tragic fact is that all"
- p. 11, l. 41, instead of "form" read "forms"
- p. 12, l. 2, instead of "It" read "The structure of faith" and for "form" read "forms"
- p. 12, l. 5, read "so we define"
- p. 12, l. 6, instead of "Comte" read "Kant" and instead of "of religion . . . law" read "in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*"
- p. 12, l. 7, omit "always" and for "any real" read "a moral"
- p. 12, l. 14, instead of "used to destroy loyalty" read "destroying itself"
- p. 12, l. 17, instead of "who won't" read "who as disbelievers do not"
- p. 12, l. 18, omit "who"
- p. 12, l. 24, omit "as"
- p. 12, l. 27, instead of "of the all-enveloping . . . always" read "the all-enveloping; this is always"
- p. 12, l. 28, instead of "a" read "the"
- p. 12, l. 29, replace the period with a comma, and omit "This much . . . only"; then read "but"
- p. 12, l. 30, omit last sentence and add, "Our natural mind is not Godless, but suspicious, distrustful of God as One whose faithfulness to us and all our fellows and causes is in doubt. This negative faith in God distorts all our other structures of faith. Redemption involves, therefore, the reconstruction of all these broken structures of our common life."



## Explanation of Dr. Niebuhr's Address

The first address by Dr. Niebuhr was recorded and transcribed with his permission. Such a transcription does not do full justice to one's written style and needs to be read in that light. Furthermore no recording can be regarded as absolutely accurate. Because of heavy demands on Dr. Niebuhr, due to his position as Director of the Survey of Theological Education in the United States and Canada, the following corrections could not be made in time to be inserted in the text. The reader is asked to note the corrections and especially to read the three added sentences at the close of the lecture.

The Editorial Committee is pleased to note that some of this material will be incorporated in a book which Dr. Niebuhr plans to publish at a later date. Our readers will welcome the appearance of such a volume.

Page 3, line 6, instead of "contacts" read "points of contact."

p. 3, l. 12, instead of "maximal thing, whether it is or is not" read "maxim that a thing is what it is and not"

p. 3, l. 23, instead of "the sight and the structure" read "sight of the structure"

p. 3, l. 25, instead of "in that" read "by reference to the fact that"

p. 3, l. 31, instead of "the ideal that Christian love can be divine *agape*" read "an idea of Christian love as divine *agape*, love of the unworthy"

p. 3, l. 32, omit "But" and read "a great structure" instead of "the great structure"

p. 3, l. 33, omit "is" and substitute a comma.

p. 3, l. 34, instead of semi-colon insert a comma.

p. 3, l. 35, instead of "invites reciprocal love of the neighbor" read "invite reciprocal loves"

p. 3, l. 36, instead of "is my neighbor" read "are my neighbors"

p. 3, l. 37, instead of "have done it . . . to Jesus Christ" read "love these, I love Jesus Christ"

p. 4, l. 1, instead of "himself" read "the self"

p. 4, l. 9, omit "But"

p. 4, ll. 13, 16, omit quotation marks.

p. 4, l. 24, omit "This is what I mean by atoms indivisible"

p. 4, l. 26, read "nuclei and electrons, of protons and neutrons"

p. 4, l. 29, read "a simple fact in my existence"

p. 4, l. 38, omit "In the case of Kant"

p. 4, l. 40, omit quotation marks after "certain"

p. 4, l. 43, omit "perhaps" and at the end of the line read "I have the opinion — believing"

p. 5, l. 1, instead of "I know" read "knowing and then insert quotation marks.

p. 5, l. 4, after "I know them" insert "So Kant and A. E. Taylor seem to argue with each other"

p. 5, l. 5, omit "It isn't . . . certainly"

p. 5, l. 6, for "Is it this? In believing" read "Is it not this, that in believing"

p. 5, l. 8, substitute question mark for period after "relationship"; and instead of "I know . . . fire" read "I know these walls around us"

p. 5, l. 10, instead of "Now . . . going to use" read "There is this difference in our relationships to things whatever the words may be we use for the two sorts of relation"

p. 5, l. 17, omit "the"

p. 5, l. 19, omit semi-colon after "companion" and substitute a comma.

p. 5, l. 21, insert "who" between "people" and "from" and omit it after "onward"

p. 5, l. 35, instead of "mean to say" read "may say"

p. 6, l. 5, instead of "pertinent" read "implicit"

p. 6, l. 6, omit "here"

p. 6, l. 8, read "what such faith"

p. 6, l. 15, read "no loyalty or faithfulness"

p. 6, l. 29, instead of "calm and" read "common"

p. 6, l. 38, read "by ourselves when we know"

p. 6, l. 39, omit "I am immediately . . . aware, but"

p. 7, l. 6, read "concepts and ideas in connection"

p. 7, l. 21, read "What he has to say"



<sup>knowing</sup> and I know. "No," says another philosopher, "that isn't quite right. Believing can be more certain than knowing. There are some things that I believe of which I have greater assurance than of other things about which I say 'I know them.' " <sup>So Kant & A. J. Ayer seem to argue with each other</sup>

~~It isn't a matter of certainty.~~ What is the difference between believing and knowing? <sup>Is it this?</sup> In believing I have an indirect relationship to that which I believe, and in knowing I have a direct relationship? In knowing there is always some vision. I know ~~there is~~ <sup>these walls</sup> ~~fire~~ <sup>around us</sup>. I believe that there is China on the other side of the world. Here is directness, there, indirectness. <sup>There is a difference in our</sup> <sup>certainly not in things, whatever the words may be used for the two sorts of</sup> <sup>relation</sup> isn't there? What are the words you are going to use? There is the difference between an indirect relationship and a direct relationship. But one thing many of those who try to understand this business of believing and of knowing lose sight of, is this, that when I believe, I believe someone, that the human situation in which I believe and also the human situation in which I know is never the situation in which I by myself confront ~~the~~ facts like China, and I by myself confront the facts like this flag, but is always the situation in which there is present to me a companion; another. When I believe, I believe someone who tells me something about a third reality. I believe all these people from childhood onward who have told me that on the other side of the planet there is a nation to which we give the name China and which is characterized by the qualities of culture which it has had in history. I have no knowledge of China. I have many beliefs about China. I've never been there but I'm certain of it. Why am I so certain of the existence of China which I shall never know? By inference? No, by faith. By belief. I learned about it in my geographies from six years of age onward. Perhaps I heard about it before. I've gone to museums, I've seen pictures from China. At least the man who put that picture in says it's from China. The inscription underneath says it's from China. I've looked at vases, and it's been written underneath this vase on some little placard that it was from China. I believe. Whom do I believe? Not simply, What do I believe, but, Whom do I believe? I believe someone. I believe a company of people. Now why do I believe someone? I mean to say, I believe those who have direct knowledge of the facts. I believe the man who has been there, who has been in China. I believe the man who has experimented with the atoms. I believe the ones who know, but do I believe them because they know? Or do I believe by an act of trust in someone of whom I not only have the opinion that he knows, but in whom I have the confidence that he is not going to fool me, cheat me, deceive me; that he is being loyal to me in what he tells

me about the atom, about China, about the Bible, about God, about all the realities with which my contact can be so indirect?

Here a little bit of the structure of faith begins to come to appearance, doesn't it? The structure of faith that is not peculiarly religious, but that is human. A structure of faith which is pertinent in the fact that here this self believes a statement made by another self and does so by an act of trust in the loyalty of the other self. I'll have to use at least three words in order to say what faith is. I'll have to use the word *believing*. I believe a statement; but I believe the statement because I, as a self, trust in another's loyalty. And the Latin helps us here; for belief it has the word *fides*, for trust it has the word *fiducia*, and for loyalty it has the word *fidelitas*. *Fides*, *fiducia*, and *fidelitas*, — these belong together; where there is no *fiducia*, no trust, there can be no believing, and there can be no trusting where there is no loyalty; no faithfulness.

Think of these words in the New Testament. When Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth," what did He mean? Did He mean, Will He find people believing that there is a God? Did He mean, When the Son of Man comes will he find faithfulness, loyalty on earth, or only deceit and treason? Will the last end of man be the universal deceitfulness and treasonableness in which the hand of everyone is raised against all the rest and no one can believe anybody else any more? I think we've had a few previsions of the possibility of the end of mankind in these last years. Not in the atom bomb, the hydrogen bomb, but in the decay of confidence in each other's loyalty and in the decay of loyalty to our cause. The horrid vision has come before us of a universal suspicion of treason and of a universal treason reciprocating with that suspicion.

What's faith? Faith as I know it in my calm and human life seems first of all to be a kind of double relation between the I and the Thou in which I trust in thy loyalty to speak the truth to me as thou seest the truth and in which I trust in thy faithfulness, not only to me but to something else. For a third dimension comes into view, a third part of this structure of faith. There is not only the reciprocity of I-trusting-you-, you-being-loyal-to-me; there could not be real faith if there were only the I-Thou relationship. In case of faith it seems to be somewhat as in the case of knowledge. Sometimes we speak as though we are by ourselves. I ask myself questions about what it means to know this watch and I am immediately aware, no I am not immediately aware, but after a little inquiry I become aware of the fact that I've used some words, "this watch," and that these words are not my own. And the very employment of words means that I

want to communicate with somebody else about this watch, and that I couldn't know this watch if there were not in my mind the memory of all those who have known with me and have called it by this name "watch," and if there were not in my mind those to whom I'm going to speak about the watch; whom I'm going to ask to verify my impressions, my perceptions and my use of concepts, ideas, in connection with this perception. I know nothing by myself. If I were by myself I would know nothing, I suppose. There is always the fellow knower.

But there is something else in the structure of knowledge and that's the great context of things. Now look at this business of faith. I believe you about something. But when I believe you about something of which I think you have direct knowledge I not only have confidence in your loyalty to me; that you will not bear false witness; that you will not deceive me; but I have confidence in something else: that you are loyal to a cause and not just to me. That you are faithful, not in the sense that you count me of some value to yourself but that you are faithful in the sense that you will not deceive me and you will not betray some cause to which you and I are both committed.

Josiah Royce has of course called attention to the importance and the reality of these causes in our human existence more than any other modern philosopher. But what he's got to say seems to make a great deal of sense even in terms of ordinary experience. Let's look at a very simple situation, relatively speaking. <sup>Some</sup> of us have participated in this situation. Two soldiers in a field. Think of two soldiers in Korea in the late war. They are bound together by loyalty to each other. And they trust in each other's loyalty, that the other fellow won't let him down. This seems to be the central feature of their existence. They are not going to desert, because they are not going to let their companions down. They are not going to desert because they believe their companions will not let them down. And all the fears are overcome or quenched in some way by the act of loyalty. But then there is something else there. They are in this situation as those who are required to be and who are loyal to a cause that includes both of them and that concerns both of them. They call it the United States, perhaps, or they call it democracy, or something of that sort. Now their loyalty to the cause may be a less tangible or less real thing than their loyalty to each other but nevertheless the cause is there. It has put them together, at that point, and they have to believe this somehow, that the other fellow will not be disloyal to the common cause. Then they have to believe a third thing of which the soldiers are often very dubious. Namely, that the common cause will not be disloyal to them. That it will not deceive them.



Here in this patriotic situation a structure of confidence, trust, and loyalty begins to appear which looks something like this. I trust the companion in his loyalty to me, and in his loyalty to the cause to which I am also trying to be faithful. I expect his trust in me as one who will not only never let him down but as one who will not let down the cause and then I somehow try to trust the cause, that which transcends us both as that which will not let him down or deceive him and which will not deceive me or let me down. Here is at least a kind of triad of faith.

Let's look at it in some other situations, human situations. Here we are in a school, a community. Now we call this community a community which is devoted as a school to the pursuit of truth. There are other elements that enter into the case of a theological seminary but let me overlook this and say that we claim we are united here in the search for truth. Use a big word like that for a moment, truth. I entered into this community as a student. I have a relationship now, not only to fellow students, but say, first of all, to teachers. Now, in that situation I wouldn't go to the school at all or I would not become a member of a community if I didn't trust the teacher. But I trust him, in part, to "know his stuff." To know. But now something else enters. I trust him insofar as he becomes my real teacher as one who will not deceive me. As one who will not, for the sake of personal advancement, or some other reason, say things he doesn't believe himself. I trust him to be loyal to me. Not to bear false witness against me, his neighbor. At the same time, in this school he has to trust me, to have faith in me as one who will not deceive him. He's often full of suspicion there. Think of the honor systems in our schools, and the rest. But, nevertheless, unless this relationship is present, of mutual confidence in each other's loyalty as those who will speak the truth with each other, to each other, — without this I cannot have a school, but does this make a school? There must be something more, must there not? There must be the common commitment of student and teacher to a cause that transcends both of them. It is not a school if it becomes the student-centered place where the teacher is simply concerned to help this student make his way in the world, to make a success of himself. This is not a school. It is not a school if the student comes to the teacher for the sake of having his own personal cause advanced. It becomes a school when the teachers and students are committed to a cause and say, as an old predecessor of mine at Yale, Nathaniel Taylor, said, "Let's follow the truth even if it leads us over Niagara." We have a cause here. The cause of the truth. But now something else is implied. This is implied: that the truth won't let us down. That to seek the truth about things is not going

to be inimical to and dangerous to our existence. That it will not be destructive of the other realities that we love, — our neighbors, ourselves. It's a great act of faith, isn't it, to say truth, beauteous truth, truth-beauty; it's a great act of faith to say truth is holiness and holiness is truth. It's a great act of faith to say if we speak the truth and always devote ourselves to the truth and the other causes that we love, our nation, our churches, will not be destroyed. There are many people today who are a little worried about this. If we always seek the truth and speak the truth will we not endanger democracy? The idea, of course, of democracy was that you could afford to do this, you could afford to give the people the right of free speech because truth would vindicate itself. Truth would be loyal to man. Truth would not let him down.

There is something like this in the case of the community of justice, isn't there? How do we become a nation? By loving one another, by being loyal to one another? By saying that we Americans are going to be faithful to one another, and trust one another? Or by saying "This America, this whole community of us Americans has a cause that transcends America, for this cause we were born and therefore came we into the world that we might bear witness to something." No nation has been born, at least not in modern times unless that nation has conceived a cause for the sake of which it exists; something greater than itself. We have given this big name "democracy" to this cause; the Germans gave the name "*Kultur*" to the cause; the Russians gave the name of "democracy" or the "republic" to its cause; England has sometimes given the name "Kingdom of God" to its cause. But you cannot be united as I's and Thou's in a nation unless you have a cause to which you are loyal and about which you believe that it will not deceive you, that it will be loyal to you.

This is where this analysis of faith departs from Royce. For Royce the cause is always the community itself, for when you look at these communities you see that they are unions of I's and Thou's loyal to each other in a loyalty that transcends the community; to a reality that transcends the community. Let me offer what is to me, what is for all of us the greatest illustration of a triad of faith. You and I and our Neighbor, Jesus Christ, and God, the Father. The wonderful thing about Jesus Christ was his double relationship of loyalty to God, complete confidence in God and complete loyalty to God. Complete confidence in Him, trust in Him. "My Father will not let me down." Or "the Lord of heaven and earth is my Father." Trust. This strange thing, so unique, which makes him different from all us suspicious men. Loyalty to God, faithfulness to God, in Jesus

more than in Job; "Though he slay me still will I trust him"; though he crucify me yet will I be loyal to His Kingdom and will uphold the idea and the reality of His Kingdom." There is reciprocity and duality in trusting God and loyalty to God, faithfulness to God and confidence in Him; confidence in the faithfulness of God, loyalty to God as one who would be faithful, not only to Jesus Christ Himself, but to all companions, the human companions of Jesus Christ. And then you see in Him the marvelous loyalty to man. Not confidence in man, but loyalty to man. He has confidence in God and loyalty to God but in the case of man not quite so much confidence, and those people who think that confidence is a primary requisite here, are sometimes put off by such statements as Jesus' saying about Herod, "that fox." He knew what was in the heart of man and He didn't trust him very far. But loyalty to man: hence He seeks and saves the lost. Hence He will not be deflected from that loyalty to His neighbor by the fear of Pharisees and others, that too much loyalty to brother man may endanger the life of the nation. He is so loyal. Let those who have been cast off by society (this is because they were disloyal or because they were suspected of disloyalty) come to Him and count on Him never to deceive them, count on Him to take them for their own sakes — so He invites our loyalty to Him.

And there is sometimes the tendency for us to stop at this point and say "Christian faith is loyalty to Jesus Christ." But then we recognize that if we want to be loyal to Jesus Christ we are required to be loyal to something more than Jesus Christ; namely, to the cause to which He was loyal and to pray "Thy Kingdom come," not the kingdom of Christ but the Kingdom of God; that we are required to trust not only in the goodness of Jesus Christ but that we are required to trust in the Lord of heaven and earth; and so it becomes apparent to us, it seems to me, that unless there enters into our existence the demonstration, as it were, of the loyalty of the Lord of Heaven and earth to this One who was so loyal to Him and so loyal to his fellow man we can't believe in God. We can believe in Jesus Christ but how can we believe in God unless this triad is complete, and God is loyal to Jesus Christ, and therefore we say that "Unless Christ be risen from the dead, we are, of all men, the most miserable." Unless God was loyal to the one who was loyal to Him and who trusted Him to the uttermost, we shall forever remain suspicious of the Source and Origin of all things, the One whom Jesus Christ called Father, but whom we can't call Father unless He saves Christ from the dead. Here the structure of faith which appears in all of our relationships, it seems to me, appears, in a kind of a cosmic form. It is a triad of faith, with the infinite interactions of loyalty and trust and associated with them



the actions of belief because we are men who know, as well as men who trust others to believe and have loyalty.

There are certain corollaries of this position to which I have time to allude very briefly. One I have called attention to, that this faith enters into all of our knowing, that I would know nothing unless I were in the company of folk I can trust, and folk who are loyal, and of causes that are loyal to us. And the second thing, that in this faith there is a knowing. How can I know a person; a being who not only is a subject knowing, perceiving, conceiving, — but how can I know a person, this strange kind of being, a being who can swear to his own hurt and not change, or change; a being who can be loyal and can commit treason; a being who can speak truth to me and can deceive me; a being who can swear an oath of allegiance. This is the strange, one of the strange things, about man. Not that he is a rational animal but that he is kind of a personal convenanting being, — something that I don't find in animals. Not simply that he loves, but that he lives by faith and unless he has faith doesn't live at all as man, who never becomes a man until he can swear an oath, accept the cost, commit himself to the speaking of truth. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Isn't that a wonderful command which reveals to us aspects of this human existence of ours which never come to our attention so long as we think only of man as a knower? So long as we think of truth as the relationship between self and object, and not of truth, as at the same time a relationship between I and Thou, and Thou and I and the world beyond?

And then a further thing. Are not all of our human communities, so far as they are human, faith communities; is it only the family which has to be more than a love community? Definitely the family is founded on more than love, on something besides love. The very marriage ceremony indicates this to us when folk come to the situation where they commit themselves in loyalty and say "I will." What about the state? Do we become citizens of the state by being born into the state? Or is a state a faith community into which we have to grow as mature men who take upon ourselves the yoke of this kingdom? Swear to uphold the laws of this state. Swear to be loyal to our fellow men. Swear to be loyal to the cause of the state even though we be killed in the process or lose our reputation in the process. How could a state exist unless faithfulness like that were there?

And then this other thing. All these structures of faith which appear in all the areas of our existence in its manifold and complex form, appear largely in a negative way, — not as belief, believing one another, but as disbelieving one another. Not as trusting one another,

but as being distrustful of one another. Not as loyalty, but as treason. It appears in what one might call the form of Peter and of Judas. We have become aware of the significance of loyalty in our time by becoming aware of the importance of the question, "What is treason?" We define loyalty negatively, but even so, faith is present, isn't it? Comte made a very helpful observation of religion within the limits of reasonable law when he said that there are always two opposites to any real positive. If you take the number one, there is the opposite of zero and then there is the opposite of minus one. In minus one, one appears in negative form. Evil in the world doesn't appear as zero, the absence of a good. But evil appears as a minus one, the perversion of a good. Now look at treason. It isn't possible to have treason without faith. Treason isn't the absence of loyalty. It is disloyalty; perverted loyalty; loyalty twisted in upon itself and used to destroy loyalty. What is disbelief? It isn't the lack of belief. It is negative belief. It is minus belief. Are we either believers or unbelievers in God or are we believers or disbelievers in God who won't want Him, who will not have this belief? Doesn't faith appear in all of our human communities, and above all in our whole religious life, in the negative form, not as zero, but as minus one and minus two and three?

And finally this, when we talk about the structure of faith, in this fashion tracing its appearance in the shadows and images it has in our human communities, we are always aware of a transcendent relationship; as when we speak about truth and about justice and the cause of a country, somewhere there is involved the question of our loyalty to the universal source of the universal reality; there is involved the question of trust in the transcendent, of the all-enveloping always on the horizon of our inquiry. There is the mysterious shadow of a Power we do not know. This much we only somehow believe; usually however, disbelieve. This is the subject which I want to draw to your attention this afternoon.

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*We regret that we are unable to print Dr. Niebuhr's afternoon lecture entitled "Religion and Faithlessness." — Eds.*

# CHRIST — MASTER OR SAVIOUR

By CANON THEODORE O. WEDEL

As we go about our parishes do we not, in moments of brutal honesty, ask questions of ourselves as to the final results of our sermons? We marvel again and again at the ocean of Christian grace which surrounds us. There are saints in our flocks who put our discipleship to shame. Whence did they derive their power? Did it come to them from our preaching, or must we trace it to the liturgies in which they participate, to the hymns which they sing, and to the unexpurgated Bible which they read — all still anchored in the dogmatic Christianity of their fathers and grandfathers? The thought surely gives us pause.

For, if we should be forced to find a theological motto for many, if not most, of our sermons — those at least which preach the perfectionist moralism of our historic Jesus Christianity — we should have to confess that the motto would be "Law," and not "Grace." We have been placing burdens upon our people. We have preached to them in the imperative, not the indicative mood. Our sermons are *ought* sermons. Discipleship, presented as unadorned demand for performance, is an *ought*, not an *is*. It is Law, and not Grace. It is command and not Gospel. So with the Sermon on the Mount and our moralized parables and even with the imitation of Christ (we *ought* to be like Jesus). If we pause to reflect, there can surely come to us memories of the half-forgotten theological texts of our Bible. We may, perhaps, open our concordances to the word "law" and stand in holy fear before it. It comes to us in the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, and in the preaching of inexorable doom of the Old Testament prophets. We may chance upon a chapter like Deuteronomy 28: "It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments . . . Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed in the field. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, the increase of thy cattle, and the young of thy flock. Cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out" (Deut. 28:15-19).

Is this what we are *really* preaching when we preach the "Gospel" as an imperative? We shrink from the fearsome implications of such texts. They belong to the "brimstone and hell-fire" theology of the revival preaching of former unenlightened generations! We turn for comfort to the New Testament, — first of all to the teachings of Jesus. There, surely, we shall find no such burdensome Law-religion. Have we not assured our people over and over again of the difference



between the new law of love as over against the old law of threat and doom? But, if we read the evangelists honestly, we get little relief. Even our beloved Sermon on the Mount can bring us to book with startling words: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19).

The entire Sermon on the Mount, if interpreted in the light of this introduction, reads as if Jesus subscribed to Deuteronomy and even heightened the severity of the still relatively mild and external demands of the Mosaic moral code. And the sanctions which enforce this heightened law, like those behind the Mosaic law which preceded it, are inexorable sanctions. They are the "fire and brimstone" sanctions of our biblicist pulpit forefathers. "The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and evil-doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:41, 42).

We may well ask ourselves the disturbing question: If our preaching of the *oughts* and *we musts* of the Christian life is Law-preaching, what are the sanctions which *we* have preached to enforce obedience? Can we trust to mere portrayals of the beauty and desirability of righteousness? Have we romanticised the demands of God and placed them in a land of dreams? Some of our sermons have been *if only* sermons — "If only all men would live by the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount or by the example of Jesus, all would be well with our sinful world. Let us, accordingly, at least make a beginning." But even the most moving vision of a utopian kingdom of God on earth is, as a sanction-enforcing performance, a poor substitute for the "danger of hell-fire" threatened in the Sermon on the Mount or the fear of Him "who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell" (Luke 12:5). Fear, as a motive for action, may not be the highest of motives. We are fond of texts like: "Perfect love driveth out fear." But "perfect love" is not produced by simple means either. Fear — Isaiah's dread cry, "Woe is me, for I am undone" — may be a necessary stage in bringing us to accept the good news of divine love. Like the Law which produces it, fear may be a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

If all we can present as sanctions for our homiletic exhortations to live by the perfectionist ethic of the New Testament are the appeal of

an example and the innate urge to the good life in the human heart, we may be trusting a broken reed. What if the appeal fails, or is accepted merely as a beautiful romantic vision, or is even met with rebellion, or with the secularist's realistic scorn, or, most importantly of all, is overwhelmed by the demonic powers of evil, what is our recourse? We can only exhort in a higher key or portray the *we ought* of discipleship in more alluring colors. And if this still does not succeed, as it plainly does not with the alcoholics in our flock, or the moral shipwrecks, or those beaten down by tragedy and fate, what then?

Our tracing of the concept of Law in the Bible has, I have suggested, come upon the "hard sayings" of Jesus. We can follow the guidance of our concordances further and enter the profound thought-world of St. Paul. Here we cannot escape "theology," though it be as yet unsystematic theology and one which does not shout the word "dogma." Here the Gospel, however, becomes something more than exhortations to live the good life. But a thoroughly critical reading of the sayings of Jesus, with the Law-theology of the Old Testament as a guide, has made it clear that there is at least *latent* dogmatic theology even in the teachings of the Master. Dig deep enough, and it almost seems as if Jesus had studied the Epistles of St. Paul and had merely, with incomparable insight (gifts denied, alas, to St. Paul) translated theology into parables and practical sermons.

Be this as it may, the Law meets us in St. Paul's epistles in the form of a startling paradox. The Law is not abolished. It stands majestic and supreme, its sanctions still those of Deuteronomy and of the Last Judgment. It is as if St. Paul had before him as he wrote (as he well may have had) the very words of Jesus: "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law" (Matt. 5:18). Similarly St. Paul: "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good" (Rom. 7:12). "We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God" (Rom. 14:10). "We must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). Even immortality or a bodily resurrection will not save from judgment under the inexorable law, for there "shall be a *resurrection* both of the just *and of the unjust*." (Acts 24:15).

But St. Paul draws the inevitable conclusion. This Law, revealed in the conscience of the pagan, and then voiced by the God of the Old Testament, with threat of doom for those who disobey it, and finally revealed in the form of climactic demands in the person and

teachings of Jesus, *will not save*. It is the very opposite of "good news," though needful as preparing us for "good news." It leads to death, not life. It kills. In his seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul relates his own experience of trying to live by Law-religion: "I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me" (Rom. 7:9-11).

St. Paul, we happily recall, does not stop with a portrayal of death as the end of the Law. He proclaims the good news of resurrection. But for a gospel of resurrection he needs a Christ other than an isolated Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount. This Christ will be the same historic Jesus, but now crucified and risen from the grave, at one and the same time Judge and Savior, worshipped as Lord and God. He is a "now" Christ, not a "then" Christ. He is a contemporary Christ, and not merely a remembered rabbi by the name of Jesus. No other Christ will, so St. Paul would tell us, do us any final good. Jesus, in the New Testament story, after the Resurrection, is no longer called Master. He is given a new name, equivalent to that of deity — "far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21).

Preach Jesus merely as Master of perfectionist ethics, so St. Paul might warn us modern preachers, and you may be preaching a death-Gospel. He remains then — what, indeed, He was — the climax of the Law. We shall not be able to endure Him. We shall have made of Him, as Luther devastatingly observes, "a task-master harder than Moses." Law, let us remind ourselves again, according to St. Paul, *kills*. Christ as revelation and climax of the Law will demand a dying on our part, or will Himself be crucified. This happened once, but it can, in a real sense, happen again and again. Are we, in preaching Christ as Law — granted that we conceal the awesome concept of Law under the appealing words imitation and discipleship — tempting our listeners to crucify their Lord?

The conclusion is too startling to be accepted without protest. Nor is it fair to our intentions. We could assert, for example, that bringing Deuteronomy and St. Paul and the Biblical theology of Law and Grace into the argument is subjecting our discipleship-preaching to precisely the dogmatic Christianity which we had laid aside at the outset. We admit that we have not preached the ethics of Jesus or the call to imitation and discipleship under the category of Deuteronomic



Law or of St. Paul's death and resurrection paradoxes. *We* have been preaching the call to Christian moral heroism as an Ideal, not as Law.

Very well. But are we aware of what this means? The word ideal is not in the Bible. Nor is idealism a truly Biblical category. In preaching the Gospel as an ideal we may have stepped out of the Bible altogether, despite the fact that we have used texts out of the New Testament and have lyricized every paragraph by allusions to Jesus. By anthologizing our Bibles and aiming at an undogmatic gospel, we may have been preaching a new religion unknown to the apostles or the Church, Catholic and Protestant, until the last hundred years. Classical dogmatic Christianity may, of course, have been wrong. The Bible itself may have been mistaken. But if we are preaching a new Gospel, we ought at least to know what we are doing. In expurgating our New Testaments, we have truly made a fateful decision.

The foregoing analysis has admittedly called into court only one of the major categories of Biblical theology — the Law. The Law is, of course, not all of the Bible. It is, as St. Paul describes it, only a "School-master," or, as a revised translation has it, "our custodian until Christ came" (Gal. 3:24). But the concept of Law is, quite possibly, the crucial issue. Transform Law into Ideals, and everything is changed.

Ideals are impersonal. Nor do they cease to be impersonal when they receive the sanction of the teachings of Jesus, or even of His divine-human example, or the moving call to imitate His perfection. You cannot pray to ideals. Nor will they save the weak and the lost. They may be reinforced by all manner of exhortations and sanctions on the human plane and yet fail to ensure performance. Nor does it help ultimately to derive them from the lips of Christ and then to give him traditional orthodox titles of respect — Christ, Lord, Son of God. Even discipleship of Jesus as Master can still remain outside the true thought-world of the New Testament. Such discipleship was tried, but it did not produce Christians. It ended in "forsaking," and treachery, and failure. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" (Luke 24:21), so the disciple-group expressed their tragic disappointment in Jesus at the climax of His earthly career. He had, alas, *not* redeemed Israel — not as Master!

I realize that accusing our modern cult of the "historic Jesus" of being mere impersonal idealism will strike many a devotee as utterly unfair. "We have Jesus, not alone as teacher, but as person. Loyalty to Him — and discipleship as well — goes far beyond devotion to an ethical code or an ethical ideal."

A full discussion of the place occupied by the "historic Jesus" in our "Christianity without dogma" would carry us far afield. A brief analysis will have to suffice.

One may grant at the outset that this undogmatic Christianity, with its "historic Jesus," has one thing in common with its rival. It has a remembered Christ. The Christianity of St. Paul and of the early Church had this remembered Jesus only, though it did not make Him the center of its Gospel. What happens when a remembered Jesus is thus isolated? He ceases to be the living Christ of the Christian creeds, resurrected and ascended, reigning as Lord in heaven and coming to judge the quick and the dead. Hence a relationship with Him must be by way of memory alone. Is this possible? Yes, clearly, in a way. Remembered figures in history can become contemporary. George Washington is still, for Americans, the "Father of his Country"; Abraham Lincoln retains his hold on our loyalty through his words and example. So Jesus. Indeed, as supreme expression of the divine in human history, His hold on the imagination can assume ethically inspiring forms. He was, so a devotee of undogmatic Christianity would assert, the First Christian — model, exemplar, friend, and brother of His disciples in His lifetime, and, by way of memory, our contemporary friend and brother as well. Even the word "Savior," extracted, to be sure, from its context in later theological dogma, can be metaphorically employed in describing His place in history.

A generation ago, few New Testament scholars were more honored in the schools than Johannes Weiss. We may well listen to one of his summaries of faith in the "historic Jesus" as his generation interpreted it. He says of the remembered Jesus: "We value him as the highest gift which God has bestowed upon mankind, and place him over against us as he comes to us from the hand of God. Through him God speaks to us. At the same time we look on him as one like ourselves who lived his life in complete obedience and childlike trust, who bore an immeasurable burden of sorrow, and yet did not despair of his heavenly Father. We see in him the author and perfecter of our faith in the sense that he exemplified a kinship with God, to which we also are called in most perfect wise, experienced the loftiest blessedness of communion with God, and achieved a lasting peace of soul. We feel ourselves to be members of the new spiritual community of which he became the first exemplar, having won his own soul." <sup>1</sup>

This, Johannes Weiss argues, is enough for Christian faith. The

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Weiss, *Die Nachfolge Christi und die Predigt der Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895), page 121 (my translation).

"dogmatic Christ" of "late" New Testament thought has become for the modern believer impossible, though this Christ can find a place in history as proof precisely of the personal grandeur of Jesus: "We can learn from all these faltering attempts to express in formulae the nature of Christ; how his personality must have exercised the overpowering effect of inspiring men to such faith and of rousing such fantasy. If today we can no longer understand their Christology or make it our own, we are directed all the more strongly to the person of Jesus. To understand him, to gain an impression of his personality, to permit him to draw us into his own life with the Father — that is for us far more important than the discovery of a confession which can combine dogmatic correctness with historic truth."<sup>1</sup>

The personality of Jesus: who will deny its power? The Christianity of the apostolic era did not belittle it. But a gulf of infinite depth divides the two Christianities. Extract an "historic Jesus" from out the New Testament, if you think you can do so. Quarrelling with historians as historians may be futile. We are driven, however, to examine the result. Can the memory of the perfection of a personality solve even one of life's basic problems — death, tragedy, pain, guilt? Can an *idea* bring a sinner into communion with holy deity? Jesus, we may say, assures us of God's love? But he assured us of God's inexorable demands also. We are invited to enter, by way of memory of an example, into *His* oneness with the Father, *His* trust, *His* heroism as he mounts *His* Cross. But note: *we* are to do all this. We are, in final analysis, to be our own saviors, on the model of a First Christian, a remembered Companion. We are to win our own souls as He once did. But this Jesus who is to do all this for us is to remain a mere Christ of past history, not the living Power of apostolic faith. The Gospel turns, after all, into the presentation of an ideal — a personalized ideal, one may grant — but with no sanctions of enforcement except our frail human wills. Apply to it, even for a moment, one of the true Biblical categories, and it is seen to be a Gospel of "salvation by works alone." The synoptic Gospels themselves contain, as we pointed out earlier, the record of the failure of this "imitation of Jesus" religion. The disciples remained puzzled and defeated Jews until the later events of the drama of redemption had burst upon the historic scene.

A complete presentation of the problems confronting the preacher of the Gospel if he has been lured into loyalty to the undogmatic "historic Jesus" cult would involve a wrestling with further Biblical

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Weiss, *Die Anfänge des Dogmas* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1909), page 88 (my translation).

concepts in addition to that of the Law. But this, I would maintain, is still crucial. The "Gospel" of the personality of Jesus has not escaped this category any more than has the "Gospel" of the Sermon on the Mount. Turn Law into Ideals and you sentimentalize and sophisticate the whole of the Biblical revelation — yes, even the teachings of Jesus. In the Bible, as already indicated, we do not meet ideals, but commandments — commandments of a holy and living God. The whole problem of Biblical religion centers in our relationship with this God of holiness, the Author of the Law. Place Jesus as revealer of perfection under this category, and He, too, becomes Law. This is precisely one of the categories under which Christian faith accepted Him. He was in His person the holiness of the Word of God "made flesh." One has merely to read the New Testament itself, with unprejudiced eyes, to see written large a further conclusion. As incarnation of Law, Jesus did not save. He laid bare the gulf between sinful man and the holy God to the point where men could not endure Him. Precisely the religious man, the Jew of proud Law-religion, crucified this Jesus. Bring him back by way of sentimental remembrance today, will He not once more become an offence? Confronted by Him, we may again cry for the Christ of faith, the Savior-Christ of St. Paul, the Christ of the Cross and the Resurrection, the Christ of "theology."

Who of us today can boast that he has been guiltless of turning the glorious Gospel of the New Testament into an ethical self-salvation cult? We have all been deceived — at least in part. The historians have played us false. Our expurgated Bibles are an embarrassment on our shelves. We have been laying burdens on the weary shoulders of our people. We have sentimentalized the Law and called it an Ideal. We have reduced Christ from God to human prophet and moral hero. We have preached discipleship and the imitation of Jesus, not realizing that this, too, when isolated from the good news of the Cross and the Resurrection, is "burden" and not "good news." Where are our parishioners and we ourselves to get the strength to fulfill all this *oughtness*? *Oughtness* is, plainly, not "good news." Ideals do not command or save. Even a remembered Jesus, if He is nothing more, lacks powers to command or save. It takes a God, with doom and salvation under His control, to move the stubborn will of man, to humble pride, and to bring us into a personal interview with the "Maker of heaven and earth and Judge of all men."

To transform the preaching of the ideals of the Christian life from *oughtness* to *isness* will mean a revolution in many a pulpit and homiletic workshop. It will mean a return to an unexpurgated Bible.



It will mean a return to "theology." In my wrestling with our modernist Gospel thus far, I have, as already indicated, brought onto the stage of the argument only one of the major categories of the Bible — the Law. The "good news" category of Grace awaits an entrance cue in the wings. But the Biblical category of Law suffices to illustrate the difference between preaching our ethical idealism as an *ought* as over against an *is*. Turn once more to Deuteronomy. The Law does not meet us there as a mere *ought*. The Law in Deuteronomy is an *is*. Obedience *is* blessedness; disobedience *is* doom. Predictions as to outcome are voiced as calmly and inexorably as when a scientist announces a tested formula in chemistry or physics.

Law and Grace, and the other key concepts of Biblical religion, such as sin, forgiveness, justification, salvation, and many more, are not primarily ethical or moral categories at all. No secular textbook on ethics will discuss them, though it may deal with ethical idealism on every page and match our supposedly Christian vision of "the good life" almost word for word, not excluding an ethical hero-portrait of Jesus. Bible-ethics is theological ethics. It involves relationship with a personal and holy God, and the solution of problems prior to all problems of conduct. Even the Ten Commandments are not mere *oughtness*, nor are they examples of moral idealism. The Ten Commandments appear in the Biblical record as part of a drama of grace and salvation, and in a context of person-to-person relationship. They exemplify an ethic of response to an *is*, not an ethic of response to a utopian ideal. "I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." *Therefore*, "Thou shalt have no other Gods but me." *Therefore*, "Thou shalt not steal." *Therefore* . . .

The little word *therefore*, expressed or implied, marks the gulf between all ethical moralism as mere *oughtness* and the moral demands of Biblical faith. It appears, boldly underscored in the "ethics" of the New Testament. St. Paul's moral exhortations make sense only when preceded by St. Paul's theology. Eleven chapters of his Epistle to the Romans deal with theology. Only there can Christian ethics appear upon the scene. His twelfth chapter opens with the words: "I beseech you, *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. . ." (Rom. 12:1).

Enough may now have been said to arouse us to severe self-examination as we preach our undogmatic New Testament texts and our moralizing Gospel. Back we must go, even in our practical sermons, and our simple talks to lay people, to once despised dog-

matics, to a theological Bible, to a Christ of the Creeds as well as the Christ of historians.

Indictments of our moralistic pulpit, at any rate, are appearing today on many fronts. I call to witness a few ringing confessions of our corporate guilt.

"We moderns," so one of our contemporaries describes our dangerous state, "have made a great mistake in our ethical interpretation of Christianity. . . Jesus, we have said, showed us in his life and teachings the true way of life. The Church, so again we have said, exists for the admirable purpose of realizing Jesus' moral ideals. This conception of the Church I must emphatically disavow. I regard it as a grave, if not a terrible mistake. To conceive the Christian Church as resting upon an ethical basis is to sacrifice the substance of the Christian faith. The ultimate thing about Christianity is not its ethics, but its ontology. The basic affirmations are not concerning what *ought* to be, but concerning what *is*. . ." <sup>1</sup> The contrast between *ought* and *is*, in this confession, can remind us of a saying of which Baron Friedrich von Hügel was especially fond: "No amount of *Oughtness* can be made to take the place of one *Isness*." <sup>2</sup>

Or, to cite a second warning — one in which a "Gospel" of *oughtness* is once more confronted by the true *isness* of good news: "The Gospel is not an imperative; it is an indicative. The imperative which we have in our own conscience does not give the strength to do what we ought to do. If the Gospel consisted in an ideal and in demands, it would not be an *Eu-angelion* but a *Dys-angelion*, that is — sad tidings. It is an *Eu-angelion* because the first thing it does is not to demand but to give. It gives to the World what the World neither has nor knows; it discloses the secret of God's loving purpose, the message of reconciliation; thus laying a foundation for community." <sup>3</sup>

And if we should be tempted to retort that our preaching does not limit itself to a presentation of ethical precepts, but, instead, presents the appeal of a person, the Jesus of history Himself, our

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by permission from a personal letter from a colleague who confesses that he cannot recall the source.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in a passage, in which this theme receives further wise treatment, in A. E. Taylor's *The Faith of a Moralist* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1932), Vol. II, p. 136. Quoted by permission of St. Martin's Press.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 125. Quoted by permission of Student Christian Movement Press.

theologians will not leave us at ease there either. Contemporary New Testament scholarship comes to their aid. As is now well known, a revolution occurred in the schools as a result of Albert Schweitzer's disturbing book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* and the rise of what is now technically known as "Formgeschichte." It is becoming increasingly clear that the biography of Jesus, historically reconstructed as a *Life of Jesus Christ*, and then made the foundation for an undogmatic Christianity, is a romantic fiction. A. E. Taylor, whose *Faith of a Moralist* is one of the most masterly guides in leading us back to a theological evaluation of the Biblical evidence, is only one voice in a chorus when he says: "We are bound in honesty, I think, even from the point of view of the most judiciously conservative criticism, to admit that we really know much less about the Master's life than might be supposed at first sight, or than we could wish. It is not too much to say that there never has been, and never will be, a trustworthy *Life of Jesus Christ*; we have no materials for such a work outside the Gospels, and the purpose of the Evangelists was not that of a biographer."<sup>1</sup>

The author underscores the fact that for the early Christians the significance of Christ consisted in the new life "in Christ" which Jesus had left as a legacy after His resurrection and the sending of the Pentecostal Spirit. "They did not infer the transcendent significance of Christ from an antecedent belief in the moral perfection of his character, or the ethical elevation of his recorded sayings: rather they inferred these — though it is significant how little appeal any of the New Testament writings outside the Synoptic Gospels make to ethical precepts of Jesus — from their antecedent belief in the transcendent significance of Christ as the 'glorified' sender of the Spirit. *And one may fairly doubt whether, in later days, any man has ever really been converted to the Christian faith simply by the impression made on him either by the story of Christ's life or by the reports of his moral teachings.*"<sup>2</sup>

The "riddle of the New Testament," as it has come to be called, may deserve much further investigation and may not be resolved in favor of dogmatic orthodoxy as easily as the above quotation asserts. The "historical Jesus" must retain his place in the drama of redemption. He is not merely God "veiled" in the flesh, as Barthian theology seems to assert, but God "unveiled." Kierkegaard's striking words are only partial truth when he says: "If the contemporary generation had left

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<sup>1</sup> A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist* (London: Macmillan Co., 1932), Vol. II, p. 128. Quoted by permission of St. Martin's Press.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130. The italics are mine.

behind them nothing but the words, 'we have believed that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that He lived and taught in our community, and finally died,' it would be more than enough."<sup>1</sup>

One could call to Kierkegaard's attention the fact that the holiness of God "in the flesh" is revelation as well as the Cross and the Resurrection. (Kierkegaard, indeed, in other of his writings, makes much of the humanity of the God-Man.)

Nevertheless, the contemporary protest against the "Jesus of history" Christianity has, in its turn, right on its side. Only when the story of the prophet of Nazareth, — important as one act in the drama — is seen in the perspective of a cosmic action in which God "for us and for our salvation came *down* from heaven" can it have any ultimate significance. To isolate that "life" and to make it central for the Gospel is to write a new Gospel undreamt of by either the apostles or the evangelists.<sup>2</sup>

Hence the dilemma which the modern preacher faces in deciding between a dogmatic and an undogmatic Christ remains acute. Both pulpit and Sunday School classroom have unquestionably dealt with the Life of Christ — the biography, that is, of Jesus of Nazareth from birth to death — as somehow the center of the Gospel. The very word Gospel has come to be synonymous with the plural "the Gospels." This biography of Jesus, so we have long accustomed ourselves to think, simply must be primary. St. Paul's "theological" biography of Jesus, or, in fact, that of the early Church's proclamation generally, is for us commentary, not original text. Even when we are not consciously trying to place Jesus over against St. Paul, as in the Jesus or Paul formula, we find it almost impossible to see the Life of Christ, as the New Testament as a whole actually presents it, and as it must have

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<sup>1</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 87. Quoted by permission of The American-Scandinavian Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> One of the best discussions of this "Riddle of the New Testament," is the volume bearing the above title by Hoskyns and Davies (London: Faber and Faber, 1936). Another wise attempt to reinstate the "Jesus of history" in contemporary theological thought is to be found in D. M. Baillie's *God Was In Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948, pp. 30-54). Baillie there summarizes the current debate, in which Karl Barth is, of course, a prominent figure.

A true solution of the "riddle," I venture to suggest, may be found when we wrestle further with the dialectic between Law and Grace. The Word "made flesh" was a revelation of *both* the holiness and mercy of God. Without the teachings of the historic Jesus serving as necessary "schoolmaster," the Gospel of the Cross and Resurrection would have been sentimental or "cheap" grace.



been viewed even by the evangelists. Until we recapture the New Testament version, however, we shall never face up honestly to the challenge which the rediscovered Biblical theology of our generation forces upon us and which we cannot, in panic or cowardice, really escape. It is possible that we shall have to face the apparent dilemma "Jesus *or* Paul," discovering at the same time that voting for Jesus as against St. Paul is not only untheological Christianity, but unhistorical Christianity as well — a realization which can prove to be embarrassing in many pulpits.

How far our "Life of Christ" Gospel differs from what the New Testament Christians meant by the phrase (St. Paul uses it freely) can be vividly documented by recent New Testament scholarship. "The words 'the Life of Christ,' " so a competent contemporary Pauline authority boldly says, "mean for us the career of Jesus of Nazareth, but for Paul they would have meant something quite different — the present reality and lordship of the risen one. So, indeed, he actually uses an equivalent phrase in Romans 5:10: 'For if, while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.' The 'Life of Christ' is, not the remembered life that preceded his death, but the life which followed it — the present life of the Son of God." "When *we* read the phrase 'Christ and him crucified,' we think first of the human Jesus, of his life of devotion and service, and our minds move forward to the cross; but when Paul wrote the phrase, he was thinking first of all of the risen, exalted Christ, and his thought moved *backward* to the cross. Perhaps this fact partly explains the paucity of allusions to Jesus' earthly life in Paul's letters. His attention, as it moves backward, is arrested by the Crucifixion, which itself epitomizes so perfectly the theological significance and the moral character of the whole earthly life that he does not look beyond it; having begun, so to speak, from the end of the book, he has already reached the climax of the story." <sup>1</sup>

The "Life of Christ" of the New Testament faith did not ignore the career of Jesus the Rabbi of Nazareth to any such extent as the apparent contrast Jesus *or* Paul would indicate. Proof of this lies in the utterly simple fact that this same apostolic Church wrote the Gospels. Formgeschichte, whatever may be its final value, has at least taught us one thing. The evangelists lived as members of the early Church, and wrote within the context of that Church's faith. They were theologians. When we moderns appeal to a "historic Christ," in

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<sup>1</sup> John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), pp. 130-31. Quoted by permission of Abingdon Press.

contrast to the Christ of dogma, we are, of all things, precisely "unhistorical."

A quite defensible paradox, though one which is admittedly violent, could be the following: That the phrase "The historic Christ," like the phrase "the Life of Christ" ought, in loyalty to New Testament faith, to connote the risen and ascended Lord in place of the life of Jesus before his resurrection. "Historic when?" is a proper question. "Historic *now*" or "in history *now*" would be the answers of classical Christianity. "Historic once in the past," or "historic *then*" might be the answer of modern historicism. The paradox, in its true New Testament version, need not in the least belittle the "historic" narrative of the Gospels. In a drama, you cannot have a fourth act without a preceding third act, or second, or first. The phrase "suffered under Pontius Pilate" is permanently anchored in the Creeds. But neither the Bible nor Christian faith is interested in museum history. Salvation is always a present or future, as well as a past event. Salvation is an eschatological fact or hope, even when it is already "realized eschatology" and therefore present as well as future. One utterly simple explanation of the time-puzzle in the New Testament is that the apostolic age was unashamedly "modern." It was contemporary and realistic, not romantic. It sang no sentimental hymns to Jesus. It dealt with him, not in memory only or in the past tense, but as a living Power in the present, and as coming Judge. "I am the first and the last, and the *living* one; I *was* dead; and, behold, I *am alive* for evermore, and *have* the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:17-18). Jesus had once acted out His heavenly Father's will in the reigns of Herod and Pilate, but He is now ascended and, as the Apostles Creed declares, is "sitting at the right hand of God."

It was precisely this Christ, risen and ascended, who was Lord for the Apostolic Church. This present Lordship in no way denied the importance of the story before the Resurrection and the Ascension. There would have been no drama of salvation, of a divine descent, and of a rising again, no atonement, no covenant of reconciliation, no good news of any kind *without* the humiliation and coming *down* of the Son of God. When St. Paul summarizes his Gospel, he regularly underscores phrases like "Made of the seed of David according to the flesh," or "Taking the form of a slave" and "made in the likeness of man" (Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:6, 7). But the Gospel was not limited to this earlier act of the drama. The Gospel is the drama's climax and its result — the Cross and the new life "in Christ" for which alone the Word had become "flesh" and for which the Son of God had "emptied himself" and "dwelt among us" (Phil. 2:7; John 1:14).

To see further how revolutionary for our preaching a re-enthronement of the Biblical theologian and consequent dethronement of the undogmatic historian can be, I cite another contemporary witness — Peter Taylor Forsyth. Few men, in the generation when the cult of "the historic Jesus" held almost undisputed sway, predicted so clearly the debacle of authentic Christian faith to which such a displacement of authority would lead. I am tempted to fill pages with citations of his epigrams and "winged words" — particularly from his masterpiece, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, or his Yale lectures on preaching, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*.<sup>1</sup> A few citations must

suffice. The major flaw in the schools of his day, and in the preaching which has flowed from them, he locates in the modern attempt to anchor faith in the Synoptic life of Jesus in place of the dogmatic Christ of the New Testament as a whole. "If we keep critically to the Synoptics, can the Christ of the New Testament be retained?" "Undogmatic Christianity repudiates the New Testament interpretation of Christ." "It may be asked whether the synoptic Christ, when read without the medium of the epistles, could have floated Christianity out into the world."<sup>2</sup>

Forsyth goes even further and ranks the epistles of the New Testament, in their importance for our anchorage in apostolic faith, definitely above the Gospels: "The Epistles are more inspired than the Gospels. We are in more direct contact with Christ. We are at one remove only. The Gospels, with their unspeakable value, are yet propaedeutic to the Epistles; and most of the higher pains and troubles of the Church today arise from the displacement of its center of gravity to the Gospels."<sup>3</sup>

These are, for our generation, disturbing words. Yet a glimpse backward through Christian history will surely validate them. Even the historical liturgies of the Church preserve the custom of reading the Gospel for the day *after* the reading of the Epistle. Only through the eyes of the Church's *preached* gospel can the *historic* gospel story receive its rightful meaning.

On Christianity as ethical idealism and imitation of Jesus, Forsyth utters equally important warnings: "A lofty ideal is not mighty to

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<sup>1</sup> Both volumes (dated originally 1909 and 1907 respectively) have recently been republished (1949) by the Independent Press, Memorial Hall, London.

<sup>2</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1909) pp. 104, 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Theology in Church and State* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1915) p. 31.

save." An honest reading of the New Testament record of the early Christians will lead to the conviction that "as far back as we can go, we find only the belief and worship of a risen, redeeming, and glorified Christ, whom they could wholly trust, but only very poorly imitate; and in his relation to God could not imitate at all." Two Christianities confront each other in the modern Church: "For the one Christ is the object of our faith, for the other he is the captain of our faith, its greatest instance. In the one case we believe *in* Christ, in the other we believe *like* Christ. In the one we trust our whole selves to Christ for ever, in the other we imitate him. In the one he is our God, in the other our brother. It is well that the issue should be clear." <sup>1</sup>

In view of the rise of our modernist Christianity of ideals, so Forsyth can climax his analysis, all past schisms in Christian history pale into relative insignificance. Even the gulf between Rome and Protestantism is not half so serious. The Reformation movement turned on "the matter of sin, repentance, confession and absolution." But this did not mean the rise of a new Christianity. The Reformation underscored what had always been "a central affair of Christianity — a religion of repentance and forgiveness. Roman, Greek and Protestant Christianity are here at one. And the declaration now that Christianity consists in imitating at a reverent distance the religion of Jesus only shows that we are in the midst of a movement and an apostasy more serious than anything that has occurred in the Church's history since Gnosticism was overcome." <sup>2</sup>

I shall not follow Forsyth's incisive criticism of modernist Christianity further, though his writings can be recommended as furnishing a clear picture of our contemporary strife of tongues. I venture to place on the witness-stand, instead, one more champion of a return to dogmatic and Biblical orthodoxy — one who again sees our present dilemma as consisting in the choice we have to make between preaching a "biography of Jesus" or the "dogma" of apostolic faith. "What then," he asks, "is the object of Christian faith? Not a man who once lived and died, but a Contemporary Reality, a God whose awful holiness is 'covered' by one who is both our representative and his, so that it is our flesh that we see in the Godhead, that 'flesh' which was historically Jesus of Nazareth, but is eternally the divine Christ whose disclosure and apprehension Jesus lived and died to make possible." <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, pp. 73, 44, 189-90.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Lewis, "The Fatal Apostasy of the Modern Church," *Religion in Life*, II (Autumn, 1933), p. 487. Quoted by permission of the publisher.



The Christian faith, so the author continues, rests upon more than the life of Jesus between Bethlehem and Calvary. This life, in fact, is but part of a much larger whole — the drama of the Incarnation and Atonement, and leading to a doctrine of the Trinity. Why do we moderns rebel against this "theological" Christianity? The real reason lies deep. It is human pride. "We would fain be self-sufficient and this means we are not. We would fain be masters of our fate and the captains of our souls, and this says that our fate is in another's hands and that our souls have been bought with a price." <sup>1</sup>

"But in this pride," so the author concludes, in a paragraph of as frank indictment of our perilous state as I have met anywhere in contemporary theological writing — "in this pride lies our shame, our weakness and our defeat. What has it done for us? What has it done for the Church — at least for evangelical Protestantism? How far have we gotten with our various substitutes? Look over our churches: They are full of people, who, brought up on these substitutes, are strangers to those deeper experiences without which there had been no New Testament and no Church of Christ. Thousands of clergymen will go into their pulpits next Sunday morning, but not as prophets. There will be no burning fire shut up in their bones, by reason of which they cannot forbear to speak. . . . Grievous is the hurt of the daughter of God's people, and slight is the proffered healing. They go to Gilead, there is no balm. They go to the fountain of waters, and they find there a broken cistern. They cry for bread, and behold a stone." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 488, 489.

*Had space allowed, the Editorial Board would gladly have printed Canon Wedel's morning lecture as well as his closing address.*



*Lecturers for the 1955 Fall Convocation*

*October 19, 1955*

*Greene Lecturer*

THE REV. WILHELM PAUCK, D. TH.

*Professor of Church History*

*Union Theological Seminary in New York*

*English Lecturer*

THE REV. EDWIN McNEILL POTEAT, D.D.

*The Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, N. C.*

